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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/PASCUAL/RAMCHAND

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: GAZA UPDATE JANUARY 6, 2009, 1300 LOCAL

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Israeli ground forces continued military operations on January 6 in Gaza. The IDF largely encircled Gaza City and fought militants, but did not enter heavily populated areas. Contacts report IDF forces approaching the southern city of Khan Yunis. Airstrikes and naval bombardments damaged homes and at least three UN facilities, killing a number of civilians. At least 10 rockets were fired into Israel before 1300 local time. Gaza-based contacts reported that at least 120 Palestinians have been killed since IDF ground operations began January 3. UN reports cite 530 deaths over the course of the operation. End summary.

Ground Operation Continues

¶2. (SBU) According to Gaza-based contacts and local press, the IDF continued operations on January 6 throughout the Gaza Strip. Ground troops have largely encircled Gaza City. The IDF reportedly has not entered densely populated areas, but has bombarded the area and exchanged fire with militants on the city's outskirts, for example:

-- the IDF exchanged fire with militants north of Gaza City in al-Kashaf, near the former Civil Administration building and Jabaliya;

-- the IDF exchanged fire with militants south of Gaza City in Zaytun, near the former PA liaison offices; and

-- firefights were reported around Bayt Lahiya and Bayt Hanun.

The IDF reportedly arrested and interrogated up to 80 Palestinians in northern Gaza. The Israeli navy shelled the Gaza City shoreline from January 5 to 6, destroying several piers and beachfront buildings.

¶3. (SBU) Gaza-based contacts and press reported that HAMAS militants employed sniperfire and ambushes, but did not field large forces against the IDF. Al-Wafa hospital administrators reported that they were warned by the IDF to evacuate, but that there were too many wounded to transfer.

¶4. (SBU) Press and Ramallah-based contacts confirmed that the IDF cut the road between Rafah and Khan Yunis, and unconfirmed media reports said Israeli tanks were moving up the road toward Khan Yunis. There are no reports of IDF ground operations in urban centers in southern Gaza.

Airstrikes Continue

¶5. (SBU) Gaza-based sources and local press reported that IAF airstrikes hit at least 30 targets during the night of January 5 and morning of January 6:

-- the IAF destroyed nine houses in northern Gaza overnight, several of which purportedly belonged to HAMAS leaders;

-- the IAF bombed the former Saraya security facility in Gaza City for the second time last night;

-- the IAF struck targets in the central Gaza city of Dayr al-Balah and the Burayj refugee camp, killing at least five Palestinians, among them a baby girl;

-- the IAF hit two UNRWA schools Tuesday morning, one in the Shati refugee camp and one in Gaza City, and an UNRWA shelter, killing at least nine Palestinians who had moved to those facilities seeking shelter;

-- in southern Gaza, the IAF continued to bomb tunnels running under the border, as well as targets east of Khan Yunis, and the al-Noor Charitable Society headquarters in Khan Yunis.

Rocket Fire Causes No Injuries,
Additional IDF Casualties

¶6. (SBU) Israeli media reported at least 10 rockets were fired at Israel before 1300 on January 6. One Grad-type rocket struck the town of Gedara (near Ashdod), lightly wounding a three-month old baby.

¶7. (SBU) Palestinian medical contacts in Gaza and local press report between 71 and 100 Palestinians were killed in fighting January 5-6. The same reports say that at least 120 Palestinians have been killed since the beginning of ground operations on January 13. Gaza-based sources say as many as 550 Palestinians have been killed since the beginning of hostilities. Roughly 2,500 Palestinian have been wounded.

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¶8. (SBU) Israeli media reported the deaths of four IDF soldiers in the past 24 hours, possibly in friendly-fire incidents, bringing the total IDF killed since the beginning of hostilities to five.

West Bank Reactions and Security

¶9. (SBU) Demonstrations continued in towns throughout the West Bank and in East Jerusalem on January 6:

-- the IDF arrested three HAMAS leaders in Ramallah Tuesday morning, including Mayor of al-Birah Jamal al-Tawil; and PLC members Farahat Asad and Abd al-Jabar Fuquha;

-- Israeli police prevented Palestinians from protesting in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Issawiya.

WALLES